

to the two men standing by the lake and bang their heads together. But underneath my anger was the nagging feeling that I was missing something, something important.

"So," she said, "I'd like you to trust me. It's important that someone does. Trust me enough not to ask for my number."

I understood the need for privacy. The thought of never having it was appalling. If it was that important to her... I nodded. She smiled at me, then blinked that lazy-lidded blink that sent desire curling through my belly. "Let's go back to your apartment," she said.

"I'll see you tonight or tomorrow night," she said as she left, three hours later.

It took me thirty minutes to summon up the energy to climb off the bed, but then I hurried: I still had to persuade Talulah to let me keep my job, and it wouldn't do to be late.

Talulah didn't believe my story, but forgave me anyway. The evening passed slowly. Nadia didn't come.

I climbed my five flights slowly, half expecting to find her in my apartment when I got there. Hope springs eternal.

For the first time since I'd rented it a year ago, the apartment seemed bleak and empty. At least the power was back on. The laptop blinked at me. I hesitated, then turned it off. Nadia deserved her privacy.

I was tired, and hungry, but all the food in the refrigerator had spoiled. Tomorrow. I'd deal with everything tomorrow.

I touched the stain on the wall and climbed into bed. The sheets smelled of her.

The reporter turned away from the rain-streaked window. "Zeus and Semele," he said, "and she'll burn you. At least with two women it won't be a case of Leda and the Swan." Then he turned into Nadia. "Trust me." She laughed and the laughter took shape, dark, with wings, and flew out of the window. "You see," she said earnestly, walking towards me, "it's not a question of whether you trust me, but whether or not I can trust myself." She came closer and closer and I began to panic, then suddenly she was choking: a rope with weights was wrapping around her neck, snakelike. "No!" she screamed, "not this time!" and then the one strangling was me, and Crooked Finger was coming through the door with a mop and bucket and a big plastic bag.

I had other dreams, but that was the one I remembered when I woke up at midday.

Zeus and Semele. Some Greek myth or other. Uneasy dream logic.

Last night, if anyone had asked me, I would have told them I trusted Nadia completely, believed everything she said. I'd even thought that I no longer needed to read the court abstract, that I didn't wish to absorb others' comments on a woman I was beginning to care for. But sometime during my dreams, little inconsistencies had floated up from my subconscious and now sat in a clump, demanding to be heard.

It's not a question of whether you trust me, but

whether or not I can trust myself... What did I know about Nadia, really?

When I climbed out of bed I ignored the laptop and went straight back to the library.

All the way back on the train, hours later, I stared at the smeared window, not seeing the city or reflections of the hot, bad-tempered commuters homeward bound; seeing nothing but a mind's-eye picture of the library screen, with those damning, damning words.

After hearing assurances that Kyoto-TEC were well placed to foster and develop Nadia Amin's natural talents, to the eventual benefit of all Americans, Judge Thurman indicated her willingness to transmute sentence and accord Amin status as National Treasure. The judge expressed some reservations about Kyoto-TEC's precautions. K-T again called expert witness Macilvaney, psychiatrist, who reiterated that Amin was unlikely to prove dangerous to the general public. Despite this, he assured the court, K-T would – under his personal supervision – undertake to keep Amin under observation at all times, and to physically restrain her at those times of greatest risk – during solar and atmospheric storms.

K-T's counsel reminded Judge Thurman that the Secretary of Labour had asked for special consideration of this case, given the number of jobs likely to be at risk should K-T go into receivership, which it assuredly would if their investment in Amin was not realized.

Judge Thurman expressed further reservations but admitted that given the recent directives from the Supreme Court she had little choice. She reminded Kyoto-TEC that the untimely death of a young man at Amin's hands was a good reason, a very good reason, for the original sentence of life in a secure mental institution, and she reiterated her promise that if K-T ever forgot that, if they ever deviated by one iota from their proposed security arrangements, she would send them all to jail, Supreme Court or no Supreme Court.

Whereupon Justice Thurman formally declared Nadia Amin to be a National Treasure, thereby superseding state jurisdiction and overturning any earlier sentences handed down in the United States of America, and remanded Amin into the protective custody of Kyoto-TEC, incorporated, under the conditions set forth in Document 157-3B, until such time as a higher court declared said ruling null and void.

And then, because I hadn't wanted to think about what I'd just read, I'd looked up the story of Zeus and Semele.

I got to the bar early. I didn't know what else to do. I must have been in a daze, because even now I don't remember what Talulah said, or what I said, or anything about the first couple of hours. I moved through the evening on auto-pilot, saying hi to the customers, laughing at their jokes, making the right change.

When Nadia walked in the evening did not so much come into sharp focus as ripple and reform around her, like a cloak. Even knowing what I knew, understanding the risks she had taken, I couldn't set aside the flood of memory images that overlay her appear-

# Mutant Popcorn

## Film Reviews by Nick Lowe



Winona Ryder and Gary Oldman in 'Dracula'

If, like my local, you get the stock code wrong and inadvertently order a dumpbin full of unshiftable novelizations, you can actually treat yourself to Fred Saberhagen's Francis Ford Coppola's James V. Hart's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. For a project that takes its progenitor's name so visibly in vain, that's an awful lot of dead weight above the line, and it's not surprising the poor old Count lumbers up to his near-centenary a touch overdressed for the occasion. Risible, overblown tack, not a doubt; but full to squelching with weird fascinations, not least of which now has been the global public's eager compliance in the whole enterprise. I watched with a paying audience, and was amazed to see it was 70% female – mainly parties of two to four women in their twenties, with occasionally a solitary outnumbered male in tow. Somewhere, amid all the humiliations heaped on Stoker by this bloated corpse of a narrative bearing his name, something's certainly managed to hit an unusually juicy and untapped vein.

Overall, what Hart's script does with Stoker, disastrously inappropriate though it is in some essentials and deplorably misguided on many matters of detail, still has a lot more to commend it than what Coppola and his merry troupe of muggers do with Hart. As with his *Hook*, Jim V.'s made a screenplay that positively sweats with respect and sympathy for his literary source, and that bravely assumes a similar depth of familiarity from its audience in its attempt to shed the skins of earlier film versions and return to the source made fresh – only to drop tailgate and tip in a steaming hundredweight of home-made added ingredient, with a perverted view to making the resulting stew more conventionally appetizing to a mainstream Hollywood palate. In *Hook*, it was the redemptive power of fathering; and in *Dracula*, of course, it's Love Never Dies, the undying passion of Mr & Mrs Wlad across the barriers of time, continents, death, everlasting damnation, sexual and dietary habits, and uproariously ill-fitting accents.

Some of the transplant actually does take reasonably well (particularly the tradition of Lady Impaler's evocative suicide); some requires a stiff dose of suppressants ("I understood at last how our love could release us from the powers of darkness. Our love is stronger than death!"); and some, alas, simply pops all stitches and jumps out across the room on a seven-foot cartilaginous spring

(such as the unmarried Mina's apparent freedom to walk the West End streets of 1897 unchaperoned, picking up swarthy strangers with whom to invent the back-row-of-the-cinematograph experience).

Indeed, Hart's at his consistent worst when his improvements to Stoker require him to tangle with the intricacies of Victorian manners, of which he seems

to have no measurable grasp, and where he seems compelled to repel the novel's social and sexual subtexts in enormous red block capitals. To convey the notion that Lucy Westenra is a bit of a goer, Stoker simply had her flirt in a rather mild way with a trio of tasty suitors; Hart has her leaf with Mina through illustrated unabridged Burtons, tease her beaux with music-hall double-entendres